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Pooling diverse development experience 'reaps rewards'

Creating spaces for dialogue and collaboration between different global development sectors and academic disciplines can help drive research more attuned to the complex interconnections of development, a meeting heard last week (23 May).

Over the past few decades, development interventions have often been constrained by a narrow, sectoral approach that fails to address the fundamentally intersecting nature of development, said participants at the biannual conference of the London International Development Centre (LIDC).

The centre was launched in 2008 by a consortium of colleges from the University of London to forge innovative, integrated approaches to development problems by pooling academics' diverse expertise in areas such as agriculture, gender and health.

The LIDC has facilitated meetings bringing together social scientists — anthropologists, sociologists and economists — and natural scientists — epidemiologists, hydrologists and veterinarians, among others — to discuss issues ranging from water and disease to gender and conflict.

Since 2008, the centre has helped nurture dialogues and collaborations that have generated funding for new initiatives, such as the London-based Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health.

As well as pooling academic and sectoral expertise in the West, Jeff Waage, the LIDC’s director, said, the LIDC has also learned from the global South. The centre found that interdisciplinary methods were already enshrined in many African academic and development contexts.

“’The really interesting thing about interdisciplinarity is that when you take it out of a British academic context and put it into an African context, there are other things that come into play, like the better utilisation of scarce resources,” Waage said. “The ability of different groups to work together — say in a surveillance programme to find out where a disease is — is actually a plus in resource-poor settings.”

But the past five years have not been straightforward as the LIDC’s launch coincided with the global economy entering free fall. “We thought the economic slump, as it hit universities, would reduce our activities, with academics withdrawing into their shells,” he said. But the idea of linking up different subjects across different organisations seems to be holding despite the crunch in academic activity.

“That’s partly because, increasingly, people who provide funding want to see connectivity, collaboration and consortiums.”

An added difficulty is finding a common language across the diverse approaches within the natural and social sciences. “Natural scientists understand that they alone do not have all the solutions to a problem,” Waage said. “But … social scientists have a way of looking at the world that uses their own methodology to come up with solutions, making it quite difficult to foster interdisciplinary work.” The next project in the LIDC pipeline is to compare different types of evaluation across sectors, Waage said.

“Impact evaluation has become such a big area in development, but different kinds of interventions are evaluated in different ways,” he said. “What we want to do is create interdisciplinary dialogue so that qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the benefits of those, can be compared.”


Some good points made here, as well as a validation of something that some African scientists and researchers have known all along: scarce (academic) resources foster innovations like inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches, as well as collaborative efforts. See for example the work conducted by Applied Centre for Climate and Earth Systems Science (ACCESS) which provides an opportunity for unprecedented cooperation across a range of disciplines which reflects the inter-connected nature of the southern African Earth System.

A case in point describing the need for cross-disciplinary connections is the recent article featured in SciDev.net which cites that; “Efforts to protect plant species important for nutrition, medicine and cultural heritage are being hampered by the failure of ethno-botanists — scientists who study the relationship between people and plants — to connect with policymakers and the wider development community.”

“A new global programme is needed to mainstream ethno-botany into development and to place local communities’ needs and traditional knowledge at the heart of plant conservation, a meeting of scientists at the Missouri Botanical Garden, United States, concluded this month (1–2 May).
Tens of thousands of plant species are at risk of being extinct, including plants used for food and nutrition, medicine, cultural and spiritual purposes, and the maintenance of livelihoods. These are needed to alleviate poverty, provide food security and ensure sustainable development in many nations, the meeting statement says.”

Aid and complex systems

This newsletter features, and refers to, the writing of Duncan Green, strategic adviser for Oxfam GB and author of ‘From Poverty to Power’ fairly regularly, and there are two of his contributions in this month’s edition. The first, below, is a blog post about aid and complex systems. The second, which is in the Economic Issues section, deals with informal markets and small farmers.

I’m at one of those moments where all conversations seem to link to each other, I see complex systems everywhere, and I’m wondering whether I’m starting to lose my marbles. Happily, lots of other people seem to be suffering from the same condition, and a bunch of us met up earlier [during May] with Matt Andrews, who was in the UK to promote his ... new book Limits to Institutional Reform in Development (... reviewed it here). The conversation was held under Chatham House rules, so no names, no institutions etc.

Whether you work on complex systems or governance reform or fragile states, the emerging common ground seems to be around what not to do and to a lesser extent, the ‘so what’s’. What can outsiders do to contribute to change in complex, unpredictable situations where, whether due to domestic opposition or sheer irrelevance to actual context, imported blueprints and ‘best practice guidelines’ are unlikely to get anywhere?

In his book Matt boils down his considerable experience at the World Bank and Harvard into a proposal for ‘PDIA’ – Problem Driven iterative adaptation, which I described pretty fully in my review. The conversation this week fleshed out that approach and added some interesting new angles.

PDIA needs funding, but not big million dollar cheques that come with all the paraphernalia of targets, milestones, logframes etc. that are more likely to kill thought than promote experimentation and learning. Instead, it needs a trust fund approach – lots of small grants that allow incubation of local solutions to a given problem while ‘avoiding a premature results agenda’.

But does that mean that institutional reform should avoid the big aid dollars altogether? Matt thought not – he portrayed PDIA as a new and extended incubation phase, which can then take the home-grown solutions that emerge and move into the more traditional aid world of large scale, large budget programming. So the challenge for aid agencies is how to create, fund and protect a space within their institutions for small budget experimentation and incubation, sitting in parallel with the big stuff.

Timelines emerged as a useful, but undervalued tool. But these are timelines of what has actually happened in the past, not the imaginary future timelines of funding applications. Matt reckons any project seeking funding should start by building a 20 year timeline of what has happened on that issue/in that locality. If done properly, the exercise of reconstructing the timeline using documents and interviews will reveal overlapping interpretations of what actually happened and recover the kinds of knowledge and experiences that all too often go missing in Aid World as staff leave and projects are wound up. We need a decent timeline methodology – Matt uses the work of Peter Hall at Harvard (opens pdf) but it also sounds a lot like process tracing (opens pdf), something our MEL team uses.

The issue of narratives is central – it lies at the heart of the response to a reductionist results agenda that privileges pseudo medical trial data over real experience. Claire Melamed likes to say ‘the plural of anecdote is not data’. True, but I think that a well-researched anecdote rapidly becomes a ‘narrative’, and the plural of narrative can definitely be evidence, if not data. Matt, ODI and Oxfam are all separately thinking about the need to build a collection of rigorous, nuanced narratives on stories of power and change – we’ll be swapping notes and hopefully coming up with some ideas for working together on this. What would people recommend in terms of references on rigorous narrative methodologies?

There was a good discussion on what constitutes ‘results’. Good PDIA-type work in developing countries requires a rapid feedback loop of results, but of a different kind to those typically demanded by the aid business. Developing country politicians want to know what’s happening with their money, what has been learned, what has worked and what hasn’t, and how the project has responded. They don’t need the (often bogus) certainty and data demanded by aid planners.

I’m thinking of writing a paper on the ‘so what’s’ of complex systems, but will first wade through the draft of Ben Ramalingam’s
f For more material from then mentioned author, Matt Andrews, see his blog

Africa’s challenge to end extreme poverty by 2030: Too slow or too far behind?

A new study on the future of poverty (opens pdf and see website here http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2013/ending-extreme-poverty ) from the Brookings Institution, by Laurence Chandy, Natasha Ledlie and Veronika Penciakova, looks at the distribution of consumption (how many people consume $1 a day, $2 a day and so on) in developing countries. They show how it has changed over time, and how it might change in future. See related coverage in The Economist here http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21578643-world-has-a-stunning-chance-take-billion-people-out-extreme-poverty-2030-not?src=scn/tw/te/pe/im/notalwayswithus. In the article below, the authors review the situation for Africa. A longer than normal article for the Southern African Scan newsletter, and unfortunately without the accompanying graphics, but one that contains excellent data and is well worth reading.

In a recent paper, we explored the feasibility of ending extreme poverty by 2030. Our analysis showed that meeting this goal in sub-Saharan Africa poses a particular challenge.

In 1990, 56% of Africans lived on under $1.25 a day accounting for 15% of those in poverty worldwide. Over the subsequent 20 years, the region’s poverty rate dropped to 48%. However, given the superior pace of poverty reduction elsewhere and Africa’s faster population growth, Africa’s share of global poverty doubled. Our baseline scenario anticipates a continuation of these trends: sub-Saharan Africa’s poverty rate is expected to fall further to 24% by 2030, representing 300 million people, but its share of global poverty balloons to 82%.

The constraint facing these remaining poor can be characterized in two ways. First, the poor may not be moving fast enough to reach the $1.25 threshold. This is a function of the rate of economic growth in the countries in which they live, and the degree to which this growth is equitable. Historically, sub-Saharan Africa has experienced long stretches of anaemic growth. During the lost decades of the 1980s and 1990s, the region grew at just 2% a year, which meant that GDP per capita fell given the rate of population growth. Though growth in the region as a whole has improved in recent years, some countries continue to underperform and there are concerns that the benefits of Africa’s growth are not being shared by those near the bottom of the income distribution.

Second, the poor in Africa may start too far behind the poverty line to stand a chance of reaching the $1.25 mark any time soon. Even under an assumption of strong and equitable growth, 20 years may be insufficient to lift these people out of poverty given the distance they have to travel. As critics of the Millennium Development Goals have shown, setting targets in absolute terms risks putting goals out of reach for those starting furthest behind.

Which of these impediments best captures sub-Saharan Africa’s challenge: are the region’s poor moving too slowly or starting too far behind?

To help answer this question, it is useful to first establish some parameters linking past regional trends, today’s circumstances and future prospects.

Over the last decade, sub-Saharan Africa’s economies have together mustered an impressive 5% growth a year, or around 3% in per capita terms. Evidence from household surveys suggests that this has, on average, translated into gains for the poor: of the countries in the region with available data, half saw per capita consumption of the poorest 10% of their populations rise by 3% or more a year during the period. Forecasts indicate that growth rates should remain high in the foreseeable future, so it is not unreasonable to expect that a 3% annual increase in income is sustainable for many of those living in poverty.

This rate would be sufficient to lift those currently living on 70 cents or more above the $1.25 a day poverty line by 2030. This level happens to be around the average daily income of the poor in sub-Saharan Africa today. Twenty-two per cent of Africans live between the 70 cent and $1.25 mark, while 25% live further back on under 70 cents.

Of course, Africa’s aggregate economic performance masks considerable differences between countries, and the location of the region’s growth engines doesn’t align exactly with the location of its poor. Over the past decade, 11 economies in the region experienced virtually no growth (Benin, Central African Republic, Comoros, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar and

Source: http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=14710
Swaziland), while four economies are expected to stagnate over the coming years based on present forecasts (Comoros, Madagascar, Malawi and Swaziland). For these sluggish performers, the pace of progress is such that living within reach of the poverty line today offers little assurance of escaping poverty in the foreseeable future. Three per cent of Africans in 2030 are expected to be poor simply because their country growth rates lag behind regional performance. These individuals start between 70 cents and $1.25 and remain there two decades later. We classify these poor people as moving too slowly.

On the flipside, not all those living below 70 cents today are destined to remain in poverty. For those living in countries whose growth is forecast to exceed the regional rate (including Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana) a fast-track route of poverty may be possible. By 2030, 5% of Africa’s population could be out of poverty despite standing below 70 cents today, by virtue of super-charged growth rates.

For the majority of those starting below 70 cents however, the $1.25 mark stands too far in the distance. Many of these are accounted for by countries where the average daily consumption of the poor currently stands at under half the global poverty line: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar and Zambia. By 2030, 21% of Africa’s population will be poor having stood behind the 70 cent mark today.

Of these individuals, three in five would have a chance of escaping poverty if they had started at the 70 cent mark, based on the speed at which their economies are growing. Their paucity initial income is their binding constraint. We classify these individuals as starting too far behind. For the remainder, starting at 70 cents wouldn’t be enough to bring them out of poverty as they also live in slow-growing countries. We classify these individuals as being both too slow and too far behind.

What conclusions can be drawn from this exercise?

First, there is a danger in getting carried away by sub-Saharan Africa’s aggregate performance. The region’s renaissance over the past decade masks development failure in several African economies. The same holds for its distribution trends: while, on average, the benefits of growth are being shared by those at the bottom of the income distribution, this is clearly not the case everywhere. Moreover, a focus on aggregate trends misses one of the biggest historical challenges to Africa’s economies: their volatility. This is especially a challenge in Africa’s fragile states, where the benefits from growth episodes are quickly undone during periodic reversals. Second, if the global community wishes to focus on the world’s graver needs, then a greater focus on Africa is surely justified. The rise in Africa’s share of global poverty expected over the next two decades is startling, as is the distance from the international poverty line that most of the region’s extreme poor currently stand. The term “extreme poor” doesn’t seem to do these people justice. Furthermore, the large number of individuals whose escape from extreme poverty is constrained by both being both too slow and too far behind gives some indication as to the complexity of solving Africa’s poverty challenge. Without a concerted effort, the goal of eliminating poverty in a generation will remain just a vision.

Source: http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/05/29/africa-challenge-end-extreme-poverty-2030-chandy

Some excellent points made by this comprehensive study, especially in the conclusion. See here, http://www.thisisafricaonline.com/News/S-Prcautious-on-Africa for example, for a recent cautionary that the global economic conditions that enabled Africa's 'rise' are now shifting, and that proactive action will be needed to convert Africa's windfall into permanent change.

More important, though, is the commentary that the kinds of papers, like the Brookings one projecting poverty have significant policy implications because it is only by; "understanding both the future scale and anticipated locations of poverty that properly informed debates can be had on the scale and objectives of future international aid". "And of course the whole post-2015 debate is mushrooming (see the latest here)."

In a new paper, entitled The Future of Global Poverty in a Multi-speed World: New estimates of scale, location and cost (opens pdf), Andy Sumner and Peter Edward add to the debate by looking across a wide range of scenarios and methods to see the level of uncertainty and bias built in to these kind of forecasts. For a recent blog post by Andy Summers on this topic, see here http://www.globaldashboard.org/2013/04/30/the-future-of-global-poverty-what-if-there-were-multiple-horizons-for-aid/
The month of May saw two important economic ‘events’ taking place in Africa. The first was the World Economic Forum annual meeting held in Cape Town (the Davos of Africa), see here for details. By far the most interesting précis, which gives a ‘feel’ for the event, is a blog post by Richard Down which is featured below with relevant parts emphasised.

The second, was the International Monetary Fund (IMF) releasing its latest sub-Saharan African Regional Economic Outlook publication entitled Building Momentum in a Multi-Speed World. It can be downloaded from here. Rather than feature it, it is perhaps more useful to refer to a short article about the annual African Development Bank (AfDB) African Economic Outlook publication as it contains some excellent data on monetary flows into and out of the continent. That in turn can be found here. As for a good overview perspective with less of an economic focus, do consider consulting the latest edition of the open access South African Journal of International Affairs with its special issue, entitled ‘Emerging Africa: Critical Transitions’. It can be downloaded from here.

**World Economic Forum 2013, Cape Town**

The World Economic Forum (WEF) held its annual meeting (the Davos of Africa) in Cape Town last week. It was the biggest so far – yet another sign that business is taking Africa more and more seriously – but beyond the numbers and status of the attendees it is difficult to know how successful this sort of event is. The informal meetings are probably more important than the formal sessions. The annual get-together of business, politicians and NGOs is extremely useful for company bosses, presidents and lobbyists to speed-date each other over the 36 hours.

Many of them do just that, putting in an appearance at the meetings, attending a formal dinner but spending most of the time in private meeting rooms or hotel suites. For the rest of us it is like river fishing. You stand by the side of a fast flowing crowd coming out of a meeting and try to catch someone you want to speak to or just meet old contacts and friends.

The mix of people this year was extraordinary: God and Mammon, monetarists and humanitarians. At one bizarre moment I turned from a profound conversation with the saintly Cardinal Onaiyekan, the head of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, to be introduced to Bob Diamond, now of Reverent (sic!) Capital, by Jamie Drummond, the Director of One (the aid advocacy organisation).

The next day I went to listen to President Uhuru Kenyatta laying out his plans for Kenya. Nobody referred, even obliquely, to the fact that if he keeps his promise, he will be absent from Kenya for months, maybe years, attending the International Criminal Court later this year to face accusations of crimes against humanity. Shortly afterwards I went to listen to the Swedish crime writer, Henning Mankell, now running a theatre in Mozambique. Maybe we will soon be reading a thriller set in Cape Town about monks, money, murder and global finance. At least he made provocative statements like: “If you have an idea, don’t wait for the money. Get on with it.”

The main themes of the conference were diversifying Africa’s economies, boosting infrastructure and unlocking the continent’s talent. So far Africa’s economic growth has been driven by the world’s demand for its raw materials and the growth of its middle classes who want all the goods and services this social group all over the world has. But, outside north and South Africa, there are very few small and medium sized businesses in the continent.

Eric Kacou, one of the WEF’s Young Global Leaders, put it very well when he said: “The amount of visible business in Africa is very small. At the top there are people who can go to the president to sort out any problems, and at the bottom there are women selling stuff on the streets. The middle bit is missing. Don’t ignore the struggling entrepreneur who can’t afford a bank loan.” He is right. Most banks in Africa make their money buying government paper. They are also happy to lend money for buying a house. But their lending rates to small and medium businesses are absurd, often more than 17%.

The infrastructure debate ground on, driven by the excellent Donald Kaberuka, head of the African Development Bank. How can the continent fund power stations and at the same time build railways and roads to create bigger markets? Gordon Brown – yes, he was there too – said that a trillion dollars were needed worldwide for infrastructure, of which Africa needs $90 billion. Only $40 billion had been pledged.
Africa’s power supply is also pathetically small. The whole continent only uses as much as Spain, according to Nkosasana Zuma, head of the African Union. Yet vast quantities of oil and gas are being discovered, developed and exported from Africa. Where are the refineries and gas-fired power stations? Kaberuka advocates an end to Africa’s dependency on aid and is launching an AfDB infrastructure bond to build them.

The lack of power partly explains the gaping hole in Africa’s development: manufacturing. The economists’ dictum is that to reach middle income status, a country must add value to its raw materials. That’s where the real profit is. And it creates wealth throughout society by providing jobs. So I was delighted to find a small South African company that makes bespoke event clothing is shifting its manufacturing from China to South Africa and Rwanda.

That is the first sign that rising wages in China may induce companies to establish factories in Africa. I asked the owner the politically incorrect question about productivity of African workers compared to Chinese. I was delighted to find an honest answer. He admitted that African workers were slower than their Chinese equivalents but they were equally skilful and he judged that in the long run, a number of factors made it sense to move manufacturing to Africa.

But the main thing I took away from this WEF was the explosion of Afro-confidence among young African professionals. Every time something negative was said about Africa, it was rebuffed by a subsequent speaker. And every positive intervention was greeted with clapping and whoops of approval.

‘Africa’s economic prospects depend on global and domestic factors, which are highly uncertain’

Nigeria and South Africa accounted for 95% of total portfolio investment of US$20.15 billion recorded in the African continent in 2012, according to the African Development Bank, AfDB.

The AfDB in its annual African Economic Outlook said total portfolio investment in Africa in 2012 stood at around US$20.15 billion and was expected to increase by 30% to US$26.2 billion in 2013, eclipsing the pre-crisis peak of US$22.5 billion in 2006.

The AfDB also gave a forecast of the growth in Africa’s economy at 4.8% and 5.3% in 2013 and 2014 respectively, driven by commodity exporters in West Africa such as Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast.

According to the AfDB Foreign Direct Investment, FDI, to Africa, was set to rise by more than 10% in 2013, approaching its 2008 record high, with the fast-growing sub-Saharan region likely to receive the majority of inflows.

It however, noted that a weaker global economy and a prolonged crisis in the euro zone could reduce commodity export earnings, overseas aid, migrant remittances and FDI inflows.

The AfDB added that African countries will be heavily dependent on aid with the exception of Nigeria, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt and Morocco, who will be the major focus on investment inflows into the continent.

The AfDB report noted that FDI is forecast to reach US$56.6 billion this year from US$49.7 billion last year, short of US$57.8 billion recorded in 2008.

The AfDB said, "Almost the entire projected increase in FDI to Africa is expected to be in sub-Saharan Africa, while in 2012 northern Africa absorbed half the increase in FDI."

"This confirms sub-Saharan Africa’s economic dynamism as well as the hesitance of investors over political developments in North Africa, particularly in Egypt."

"Africa’s economic prospects depend on global and domestic factors, which are highly uncertain. According to estimates, a one percentage point decline of GDP in OECD member countries causes African GDP to decline by about 0.5% and Africa’s export earnings by about 10%.”

The report said total external financial flows to Africa, including FDI, portfolio investment, official development assistance (ODA) and remittances are projected to reach US$203.9 billion in 2013, above a record high of US$186.3 billion in 2012.

"But as the euro zone crisis hurts the employment prospects of the African diaspora in Europe, remittances to the continent could grow at a slower pace."

"Africa’s ability to attract higher financial flows after the 2008 crisis reflects improved macroeconomic policies but hides disparities between countries."

"Five countries account for more than 50% of total external flows: Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Morocco and DRC,” it said. "In contrast, half of African countries rely on aid as the largest external source of finance for development needs,” the AfDB said.
Are global value chains really the right answer for small farmers?

As mentioned above, herewith the second contribution from Duncan Green – some critically important points made around the importance of informal markets for small farmers.

If you’re interested in livelihoods, value chains, or agriculture, you absolutely have to read a great new paper from IIED and HIVOS. Small producer agency in the globalised market, (opens pdf) by Bill Vorley, Ethel del Pozo-Bergnes and Anna Barnett, does for our thinking on livelihoods what the Africa Power and Politics Programme does for governance, or Portfolios of the Poor for financial systems – challenges most of the conventional wisdom and makes a whole lot of sense, crystallizing those ‘back of the head’ discomforts with orthodox thinking and getting you (or at least me) nodding in recognition at the sensible alternatives provided.

The starting point is ‘looking at where small producers are — and not where we think they should be’. As with Portfolios of the Poor, by looking intently at small producers’ current strategies, you rapidly realize that the received wisdom on how development agencies can help them is probably misconceived. In particular, an awful lot of our thinking is on helping get small farmers into global value chains (GVCs). The problems the paper identifies with that strategy include:

- Informal markets are growing, not shrinking – modern value chains are the exception, not the rule. In many regions, informal local and regional markets are growing as fast or faster than global ones.
- The GVC approach largely targets the ‘top of the pyramid’ of better-off small farmers best able to meet the stringent quality and quantity requirements of GVCs.
- Farmers often prefer informal markets because they are flexible and allow them to minimise risk by running a diverse ‘portfolio’ of strategies – some family members head for the cities, others work off-farm, others produce lots of different crops on the farm. If prices or other factors vary, they change their strategies – the right thing to do in terms of resilience, but often leading them to be branded as unreliable by formal chain buyers.
- Beyond the practical considerations of profits, barriers and penalties are matters of perception and culture. Small-scale producers are typically very comfortable with informal trade, but may not see formal and modern markets as ‘for them’, given the requirements for technology, education and organisation. For some, modern markets are associated with unfamiliar language, concepts, goals, and codes of conduct. And they oblige farmers to carry higher risks.

The focus on the agency of smallholders produces other novel insights, for example on migration:

‘The exodus of young farmers should not be considered a new crisis to be headed off. Development initiatives commonly approach this situation by trying to fix problems and make village life more attractive. From the agency perspective, an alternative — more aligned with the preferences and strategies of rural youth themselves — is to think about supporting migration in such a way that young people can leave successfully and also are encouraged to return, bringing new skills and knowledge back to the countryside.’

Happily, the authors avoid the trap of romanticising informal market structures:

‘Though informal markets offer the crucial advantages of access and flexibility, and are sites of creativity and trust among small farmers and other market actors, they also have a dark side, including poor traceability and food safety, poor records on environmental impacts and worker welfare, and sometimes corruption, criminality, monopolies and cartels.’

What seems to work resembles the Africa Power and Politics (APPP’s) findings on ‘hybrid institutions’ in governance: development interventions need to work ‘with the grain’ of traditional structures. The result is a syncretic amalgamation of informal and modern market structures (e.g. groups of Ugandan farmers using elaborate mobile phone networks to get better prices when selling to informal market traders – the paper is littered with great case studies to illustrate all these findings).

Source:
http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=12969

SOCIAL ISSUES

A single tablet to tackle Africa’s hypertension and diabetes ‘tsunami’

Africa faces a “tsunami of high blood pressure”, affecting more people than...
HIV/AIDS, says Groote Schuur Hospital head of medicine Prof Bongani Mayosi.

Citing previously published research estimating that hypertension was projected to rise about 70% to 126-million in 2025, up from 75-million Africans in 2008, Prof Mayosi identified hypertension and diabetes as looming health crises for Africa.

“We really need to wake up,” he said. “These numbers are beginning to dwarf the numbers of people affected by HIV/AIDS.”

Prof Mayosi said people suffering from high blood pressure should be taking a single tablet instead of a handful of pills. “The whole idea of polypill is accepted for HIV but when it comes to the treatment of high blood pressure, there seems not to be the same awareness.”

“It is a simple idea but it has not gained wide traction, despite the fact that it has been shown in trials to be effective.”

Prof Mayosi is the author of an editorial on heart disease in Africa which was published in British medical journal Heart last week.

Poly-pills that combine two or more medicines in one tablet reduce the likelihood that patients miss doses. They are now used in South Africa for treating HIV and tuberculosis, but have yet to be introduced for treating hypertension.

Prof Mayosi said Africa’s diabetes statistics were alarming. In 2008, the continent had 27-million diabetics, or 7.5% of the world’s total diabetes population; by 2030 that figure is expected to reach 50-million.

“These two conditions are the great drivers of heart disease, and they are rising at an unprecedented rate,” Prof Mayosi said. “None of the African countries can afford to pay for the complications associated with these diseases, so introducing (preventative) measures is highly necessary.”

There were other measures that could reduce the number of Africans at risk of heart disease, some of which were already in play in South Africa. These included cutting the consumption of salt and saturated fat, restrictions on the sale and use of tobacco products, and promoting physical activity at schools and workplaces.

Source: http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/health/2013/05/28/hypertension-and-diabetes-a-threat-to-africa

See here: http://thinkafricapress.com/health/easing-africas-pain-need-palliative-care?utm_content=buffera62f8&utm_source=buffer&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=Buffer for a related article on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the dire need for palliative care in Africa.

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**African cities should be learning from one another**

During a recent KPMG Africa Conversations panel discussion, titled *Prioritising Africa’s Megacities*, the challenges and opportunities surrounding developing Africa’s megacities were debated. There are currently only three African cities – Lagos, Cairo and Kinshasa – that can be defined as megacities.

“I think that cities are where it is happening these days. Research has shown that cities make people smarter, cities make people more creative, cities are where it’s easiest to provide infrastructure,” said Sue Bannister – partner at City Insights, a consultancy focused on cities in the developing world.

According to Andile Skosana, associate director for government advisory at KPMG, the fact that the continent’s infrastructure development in its cities comes from a low base means that Africa has the potential to be innovative.

“I’m an optimist about African cities. I think we have a great opportunity because [in] most African cities we’ve got infrastructure [but] it’s old. But we have the opportunity to leapfrog; we have the opportunity to do things a little bit differently,” said Skosana.

Bannister said that one issue African cities face is that, in most cases, their exact population is unknown, making it difficult to determine infrastructure needs and capacity.

“The enumeration of people in shack settlements is enormously difficult and many cities don’t consist of just the city itself but of a kind of hinterland of people who’ve also come to try and get into the city. So although the administrative boundaries may say we have five million people, there are many, many more – and more people are arriving in cities all the time.”

Skosana agrees that lack of data is the biggest challenge institutions have in Africa’s city development. According to Scott, another major challenge is in securing investment for these infrastructure projects.

“I think that one point that is very important to make is that the perceived risk profile of the African continent is extremely negative,” he added. “It’s a very different story on the ground. It’s important to go to the specific areas, to the specific cities, understand how they manage these risks themselves – and it’s a very different risk profile than what is often perceived.”

Bannister argued that the solution to successfully developing infrastructure projects in urban centres can come from African cities learning from each other.

“Possibly one of the best ways we could have of improving development is learning from
Ecosystem services and human wellbeing; supporting poor communities in Mozambique and Kenya

A new project led jointly by the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the University of Exeter has been awarded £1.9 million (US$ 2.8 million) by Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA, a joint programme of the Natural Environment Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council and the UK Department for International Development).

The project, entitled Sustainable Poverty Alleviation form Coastal Ecosystem Services (SPACES), will investigate the relationships between ecosystems and human wellbeing with the goal of alleviating poverty and improving sustainable resource use in the poor coastal communities of Mozambique and Kenya.

The project will provide new insights into how ecosystems provide benefits for poor people and will involve communities in participatory processes such as scenarios exercises to identify more sustainable and equitable management strategies and key leverage points for policy.

For example it will investigate how valuable conserving ecosystem services, such as reef fisheries and carbon sequestration by coastal mangroves can have positive impacts on poorest members of communities, such as women fish traders or landless farmers.

A thorough understanding of how changes to ecosystems impact communities will be crucial in developing effective methods to reduce poverty and provide enhanced social and cultural benefits.

Alongside thirty international partners from Kenya, Mozambique, the UK and Canada researchers from Exeter will work collaboratively on this three year study which aims to have an enduring impact in the research locations and to inform policy through engagement with government, NGOs and donor agencies.

“There is an assumed link between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation, but what we know from previous research is that the actual impact of ecosystems on people's lives varies depending on their needs and their ability to access the benefits. This project will allow us to really explore that link for a number of ecosystem services in a range of settings,” says centre researcher Tim Daw who will lead the project.

Professor Katrina Brown, from the University of Exeter’s Environment and Sustainability Institute said: “We aim for direct impact on the wellbeing of the poor inhabitants of the rapidly transforming coastal areas in Mozambique and Kenya. We also aim to provide indirect impact to coastal poor in other developing countries through our international impact strategy.”


On related matters:
- see here http://qz.com/80657/the-return-of-the-city-state/ for a good short article arguing that nations are no longer driving globalization—cities are,
  - here http://futurecapetown.com/2013/05/media-release-future-cape-town-urges-a-firm-stand-and-leadership-against-urban-sprawl/#.UaeCq5zxV9i for news of a recent summit where a forum urges a firm stand and leadership against urban sprawl in Cape Town.

diversity and draws out tensions that arise when trying to put biodiversity at the centre of development policies, see here http://www.iied.org/botswana-biodiversity-dragons-come-together, and

- Bridging knowledge systems for pro-poor management of ecosystem services in Zambia, see here http://www.espa.ac.uk/projects/ne-i003819-1

See also here http://www.pnas.org/content/108/34/13907.long for a useful open source paper on biodiversity conservation and poverty traps.

A winner has been announced for the Innovation Prize for Africa (IPA) 2013, the finalists of which were featured in last month’s Southern Africa Scan newsletter. Interestingly, what turned out to be the winner was first mentioned in the October 2012 edition of the Southern Africa Scan newsletter under the heading 'The economic value of flies and maggots'

Larva project wins Innovation Prize for Africa

A research collaboration between Stellenbosch University and the Cape Town-based animal feed company AgriProtein edged out 902 other projects to be named the winner of the Innovation Prize for Africa (IPA) at a gala dinner at the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town recently.

The team was recognised for its innovative approach to nutrient recycling – a method that uses waste and fly larvae to produce natural animal feed.

Dr Elsje Pieterse, a lecturer in the Department of Animal Sciences at SU, was overjoyed that they had won the prize.

She explained just what exactly it is they do at SU’s Mariendahl experimental farm:

“We use various types of waste, such as food with an expired shelf life, fruit pulp and waste, food leftovers from hotels, university residences and the Neelsie (student centre in Stellenbosch) and also slaughter waste from abattoirs, and identify various insects fit to break down this waste.

“We then feed the larvae of those insects from the specific waste stream. After they have grown to the final larval stage the larvae are dried, minced to larva meal and mixed with other commodities to form animal feed.

“The larva meal is a good protein source for animals – the feed we have tested thus far produced the same and even better results as fishmeal and always better results than soy.”

Another benefit of this project is that the waste that would under different circumstances end up in landfill sites is now used as a valuable, controlled breeding area for these insects.

“We are honoured by this remarkable recognition,” said Jason Drew, a member of the AgriProtein team. "We are passionate about expanding our business to recycle more waste nutrients and supply a natural protein to feed farm animals - helping sustainably feed our continent - this is an African contribution to sustainable agriculture for our planet.”

According to a press release on the IPA online newsroom Agriprotein's approach improves the nutritional value of meat and lowers the cost of animal feed for African processors and farmers.

“The Innovation Prize for Africa winners showcase African solutions to African challenges,” said Jean-Claude Bastos de Morais, co-founder of the African Innovation Foundation and the IPA. "It is time for private sector leaders, donors and governments to work together to invest in practical solutions that will sustain Africa's economic growth.”

Winners were selected by a skilled panel of jurors based on the marketability, originality, scalability, social impact and business potential of their respective innovations.

Founded by the African Innovation Foundation and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the IPA is focused on building Africa’s capacity by investing in local entrepreneurship. The Prize mobilizes leaders from all sectors – private sector, donors and government – to promote and invest in African development through innovation.

African students invent malaria repellent soap

Meanwhile, two African students have invented a malaria repellent soap using local herbs. They were recently rewarded with a US$25,000 award at the Global Social Venture Competition. The two students, Moctar Dembélé and Gérard Niyondiko hail from Burkina Faso and Burundi respectively and are the first non-Americans to win the Global Social Venture Competition.